



In this email...

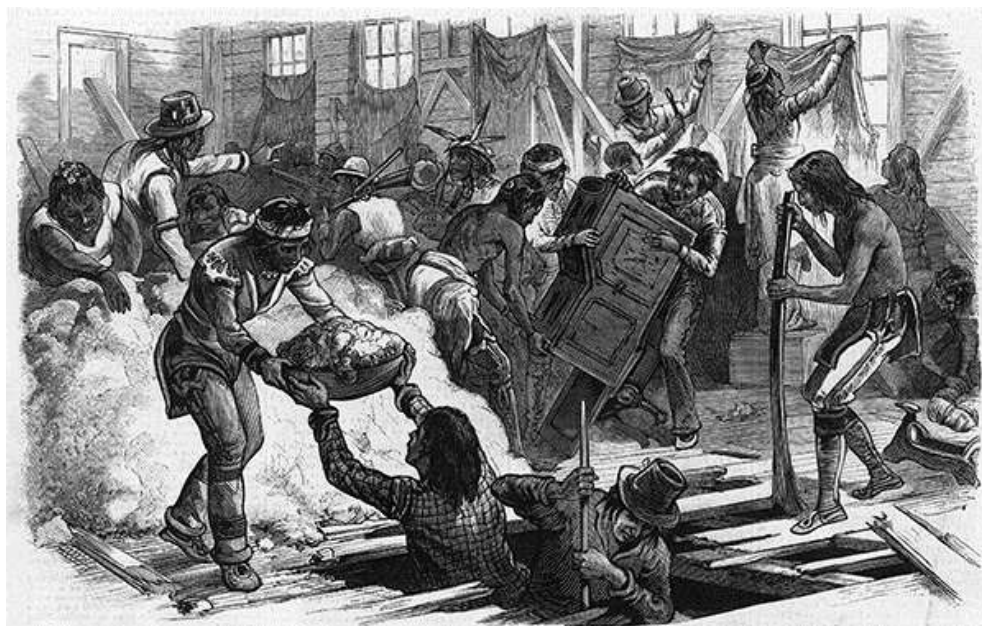
- National Register lists Hastings Downtown Historic District
- A January breakout and massacre at Fort Robinson
- One leg in the grave!
- Hobos
- Our new trustees
- Upcoming events

National Register lists Hastings Downtown Historic District



The Hastings Downtown Historic District has been listed in the National Register of Historic Places. [Keep reading.](#)

A January breakout and massacre at Fort Robinson



Imagine that you and your spouse and children and other relatives are being held in a freezing building with no food. Your captors are trying to break your will. They demand that you give up your home and let them take you to a concentration camp in a distant land. Some of your men have hidden weapons. You could fight your way out, but you will be badly outnumbered, and your captors will come after you.

What do you do?

People really faced this choice at Fort Robinson 140 years ago this January 9. It's known variously as the Cheyenne Outbreak, the Fort Robinson Massacre, and several other names (more about that in the linked article).

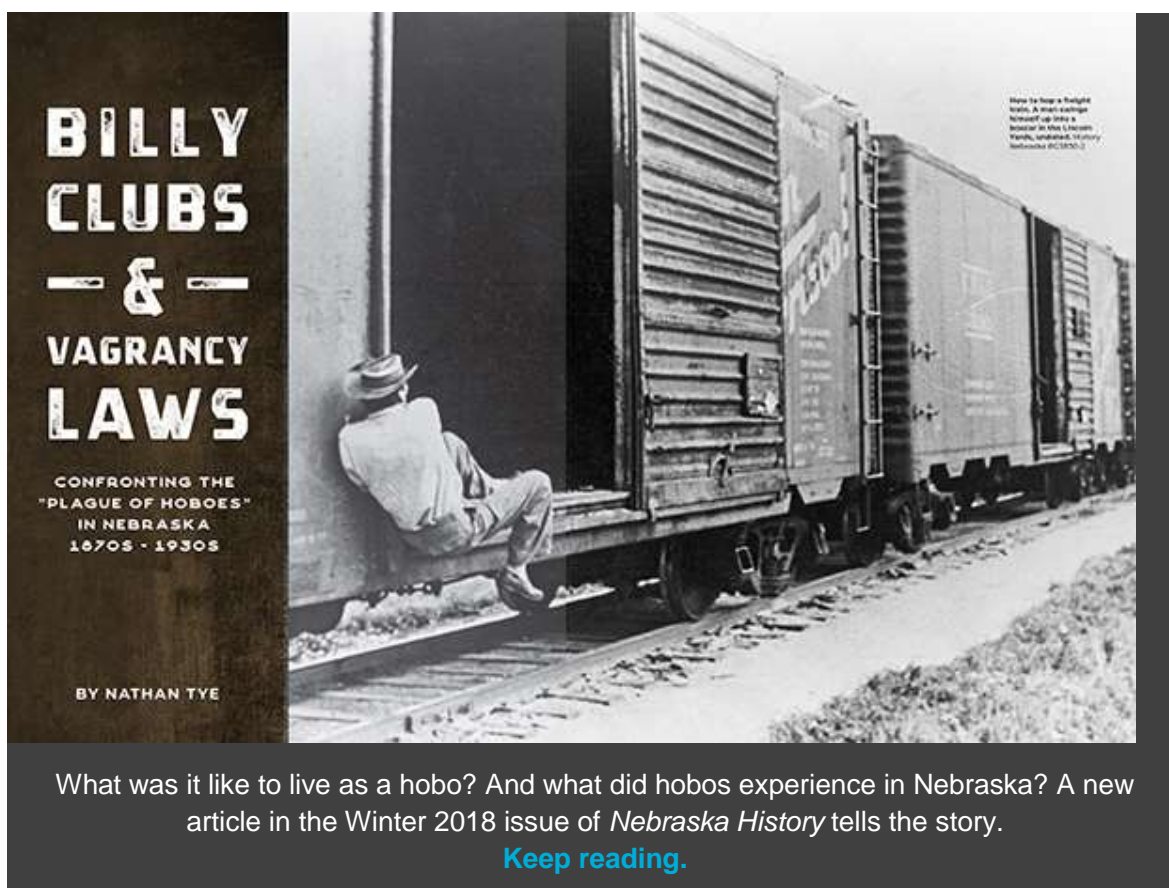
Last October we dedicated a new historical marker about events leading up to the tragedy of January 9. Historical markers tell the story of this homeward journey. They also raise questions about the names we give to events and how we remember them. [Keep reading.](#)



One leg in the grave!

Few people visit their own grave—especially not when part of their body already lies buried beneath the headstone. But Omaha police captain James MacDonald was such a man.

In the early morning hours of December 21, 1921, MacDonald and several other patrolmen responded to a call that safecrackers were looting a grocery store at 40th and Dodge. The safecrackers—or “yeggmen” in the slang of the day—were attempting to blow open a safe with nitroglycerine. [Keep reading.](#)



Our new trustees

Charles Schroeder of Eagle and David Levy of Omaha have joined our Board of Trustees for 2019. History Nebraska is an independent Nebraska state agency that is directly governed by a fifteen-member board of trustees. Members elect twelve; the governor appoints three. Learn more about our newest board members [here](#).





Upcoming events

Brown Bag Lecture, “NU&150: 12 Events that Shaped the University of Nebraska,” Jan. 17. **Sessions with the Senator**, Jan. 19 (in McCook). Former State Senator Tom Vickers on his “political hero” George Norris.

[Keep Reading](#)



History Nebraska (formerly *Nebraska History News*), January 2019 (Vol. 72, No. 1), David Bristow, Editor

Copyright © 2019 History Nebraska, history.nebraska.gov

(Formerly the Nebraska State Historical Society)

Our mailing address:

1500 R Street, Lincoln, NE 68508-1651

Want to change how you receive these emails?

You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#).

Complete articles:

Hastings Downtown District Added to National Register of Historic Places

January 3, 2019



History Nebraska is pleased to announce that the Hastings Downtown Historic District has been listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

The district, encompassing an area roughly between West 3rd Street, North Colorado Avenue, North Burlington Avenue, and the Burlington Northern railroad tracks, contains 103 contributing buildings including six buildings currently listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

These properties are a good example of the commercial development of Hastings between 1880 to 1968. These dates coincide with the construction of the earliest existing buildings to within 50 years from the present, which is the requirement of a National Register listing.

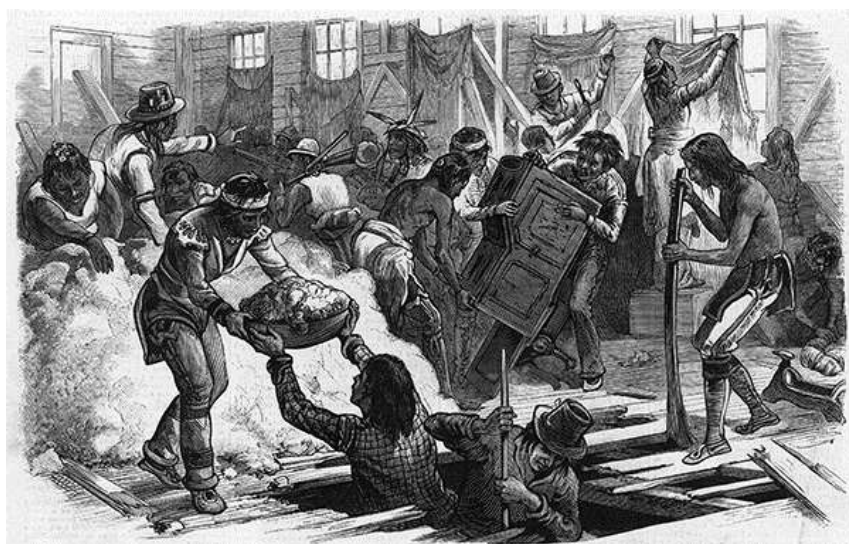
Like many Nebraska communities, the Hastings downtown district was highly influenced by agriculture and the railroad. During the 1910s and 1920s, the original route of the Lincoln Highway passed through downtown Hastings and greatly influenced its development until the highway was rerouted in 1926.

The district contains an intact collection of late-19th century to early-to-mid-20th-century commercial buildings that reflect nearly 90 years of commercial development in Hastings. The Hastings downtown district listing is the 19th listing in the National Register of Historic Places from Adams County.

The National Register of Historic Places is the nation's inventory of properties deemed worthy of preservation. It is part of a national program to coordinate and support local and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect the nation's historical and archeological resources. The National Register was developed to recognize historic places and their role in contributing to our country's heritage. Properties listed in the National Register either individually or as contributing to a historic district are eligible for State and Federal tax incentives. For more information on the National Register program in Nebraska, contact the Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office at the History Nebraska at (402) 471-4775 or visit history.nebraska.gov

Bloodshed at Fort Robinson and our newest historical marker

January 2, 2019



Imagine that you and your spouse and children and other relatives are being held in a freezing building with no food. Your captors are trying to break your will. They demand that you give up your home and let them take you to a concentration camp in a distant land. Some of your men

have hidden weapons. You could fight your way out, but you will be badly outnumbered, and your captors will come after you.

What do you do?

People really faced this choice at Fort Robinson 140 years ago this January 9. It's known variously as the Cheyenne Outbreak, the Fort Robinson Massacre, and several other names (more about that below).

Last October we dedicated a new historical marker about events leading up to the tragedy of January 9. Historical markers tell the story of this homeward journey. They also raise questions about the names we give to events and how we remember them.

Here's the story in brief:

The Northern Cheyenne were removed from their homeland to an Indian Territory (Oklahoma) reservation in 1877.

"These encampments in Oklahoma were concentration camps, where there was no food, no lodging, no medicine and diseases that they had no resistance to," author Joe Starita [told NET News](#) when the new marker was dedicated. After hundreds of deaths, a group of 300 people led by Dull Knife and Little Wolf decided to go home. They set out for the Powder River Country of Montana.

A new historical marker, "[Escape of the Northern Cheyenne](#)," stands along Highway 30 near Ogallala. It marks the place where more than 300 people crossed the South Platte River and Union Pacific Railroad. News of their crossing spread quickly by telegraph. Soldiers arrived by train from Fort Sidney, but the Cheyennes escaped into the Sandhills.

The Cheyennes soon parted ways, with Little Wolf leading one group and Dull Knife leading the other. Little's Wolf's people eventually made it home to Montana, but Dull Knife's people were captured and taken to Fort Robinson.

The people—149 men, women, and children—were confined in a cavalry barracks. At first they were free to leave the building. Dull Knife tried to convince the army to let his people either go to Montana or join Red Cloud's Lakotas. But officials in Washington insisted that the Cheyennes return to Indian Territory.



Photo: A replica of the 1874 cavalry barracks building stands on the spot of the original building at Fort Robinson. Dull Knife's people were imprisoned here.

Top photo: Illustration of the breakout from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, Feb. 15, 1879.

The Cheyennes refused. To break their will, the fort's commanding officer ordered them confined to the barracks in late December without food and without wood for heat. On the night of January 9, the Cheyennes broke out of the barracks. Some of the men shot guards with weapons they had hidden earlier, and the people fled the fort. Soldiers hunted them down. When it was over, 64 Cheyennes and 11 soldiers were dead, and most of the remaining Cheyennes were captured.

* * *

This event was long known as the "Cheyenne Outbreak," but that name is now falling out of favor. "Outbreak" reminds people of a contagious disease. It sounds prejudiced against the Cheyenne, as if *they* were the problem.

But there's not yet a consensus on a new name, and not everyone objects to the old one. Northern Cheyenne youth still participate in the annual Fort Robinson Outbreak Spiritual Run, though the term "breakout" is often used both by Native and non-Native historians. The event is also known variously as the Fort Robinson Massacre, the Fort Robinson Tragedy, or the Northern Cheyenne Massacre.

Which name do you choose? Does a new name create confusion when the old one appears in more than a century's worth of books, articles, and existing historical markers? Event names imply interpretation, but they are also matters of consensus. You can't just call an event whatever you like and expect people to know what you're talking about.

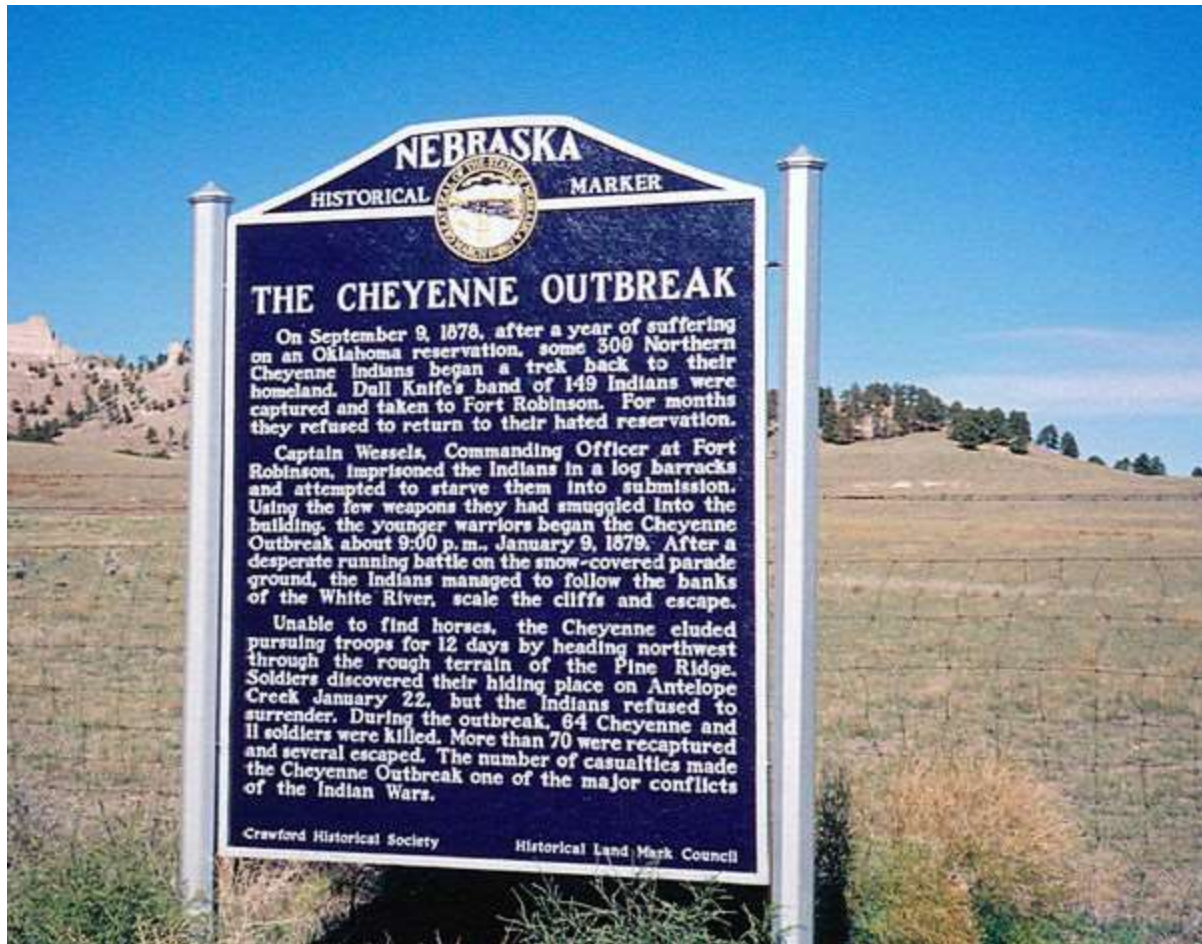


Photo: Historical marker at Fort Robinson State Historical Park, Crawford.

We had a decision to make. We needed to connect the new marker's story to the events of January 9, and we had to do so on an expensive metal sign built to last for many decades.

"Fort Robinson Massacre" seems to be the most common name in new sources. (Among other things, it's the name of the event's [Wikipedia page](#), which may be both a cause and a result of that name's growing popularity.)

We and the marker's sponsors decided to say that the event is "known as the Cheyenne Outbreak or Fort Robinson Massacre." The first name links it to more than a century's worth of references to the "Cheyenne Outbreak" in historical literature. The second is a better description of what happened and seems likely to become standard.

This difference of a few words tells a larger story. It's not just about what happened in 1878-79. It's also about what has changed since then.

Consider what else was going on in January 1879. That month a group of Ponca Indians led by Chief Standing Bear fled their Oklahoma reservation for their Nebraska homeland. In the resulting court case, *Standing Bear v. Crook*, a federal judge ruled for the first time that an Indian was a “person within the meaning of the law” and possessed legal rights.

Today we live in a culture shaped by people like Standing Bear, and by the Northern Cheyenne tribal members who gather at Fort Robinson each January for a ceremony commemorating their ancestors. The events of the past have not changed, but we as a people have changed, and the language we use reflects that.



Photo: Two Northern Cheyenne men at Fort Robinson for a ceremony in January 2018.

—David L. Bristow, Editor

One Leg in the Grave!

January 2, 2019



Few people visit their own grave—especially not when part of their body already lies buried beneath the headstone. But Omaha police captain James MacDonald was such a man.

In the early morning hours of December 21, 1921, MacDonald and several other patrolmen responded to a call that safecrackers were looting a grocery store at 40th and Dodge. The safecrackers—or “yeggmen” in the slang of the day—were attempting to blow open a safe with nitroglycerine.

MacDonald’s police car had barely pulled up when the burglars opened fire.

“MacDonald had scarcely stepped to the sidewalk... when a shot from the lookout’s gun shattered his left ankle and the bone clear to the knee,” the *Omaha World-Herald* reported in a December 30, 1928, retrospective. “He slipped to the pavement and, sitting with his back to a hitching post, continued the assault with the shotgun he carried, from this position. Here started a battle in which it has been declared more than one hundred shots were fired—a fray lasting nearly half an hour, and heard by neighbors for blocks around.”



Illustration (and photo at top of page): Omaha World-Herald, Dec. 30, 1928.

As the bandits tried to shoot their way out of the drug store, MacDonald drove them back inside with his shotgun. Another bullet struck him in the left knee. The *World-Herald* continues:

“‘You got me again!’ Jim called, and fired back, the shot striking the man’s hand, knocking down his pistol. Checks and securities, which were wrapped around the handle of the automatic, fell to the floor covered with blood. ‘You got me too,’ replied the bandit.”

Did they really say that, or that a bit of storyteller’s license? The original 1921 reports don’t include this particular detail about the men politely informing each other about the results of their marksmanship. On the other hand, each man may have been trying to lure his adversary to come closer. Or they may simply have been in shock.

One of the burglars threw a bottle of nitroglycerine, but it failed to explode. Finally, “Jammed weapons and lack of ammunition forced the cracksmen to surrender.” The three men were arrested. They’d been blowing safes all over Omaha for weeks, but claimed they’d barely broken even due to the high cost of explosives.



Omaha World-Herald, Dec. 27, 1921.

MacDonald survived, but had to have his left leg amputated above the knee. While he lay in the hospital, his wife, mother, and two sisters took his leg to the cemetery for burial in a child-sized casket transported to the grave by a hearse. MacDonald later returned to the police force and retired in about 1923 with a captain's pension.

The 1928 article noted that MacDonald now “gets about right well” using only a cane. Each Memorial Day he went to the cemetery to place flowers on the grave where his leg was buried under a headstone that read, “J. R. MacDonald / Leg 1922.”

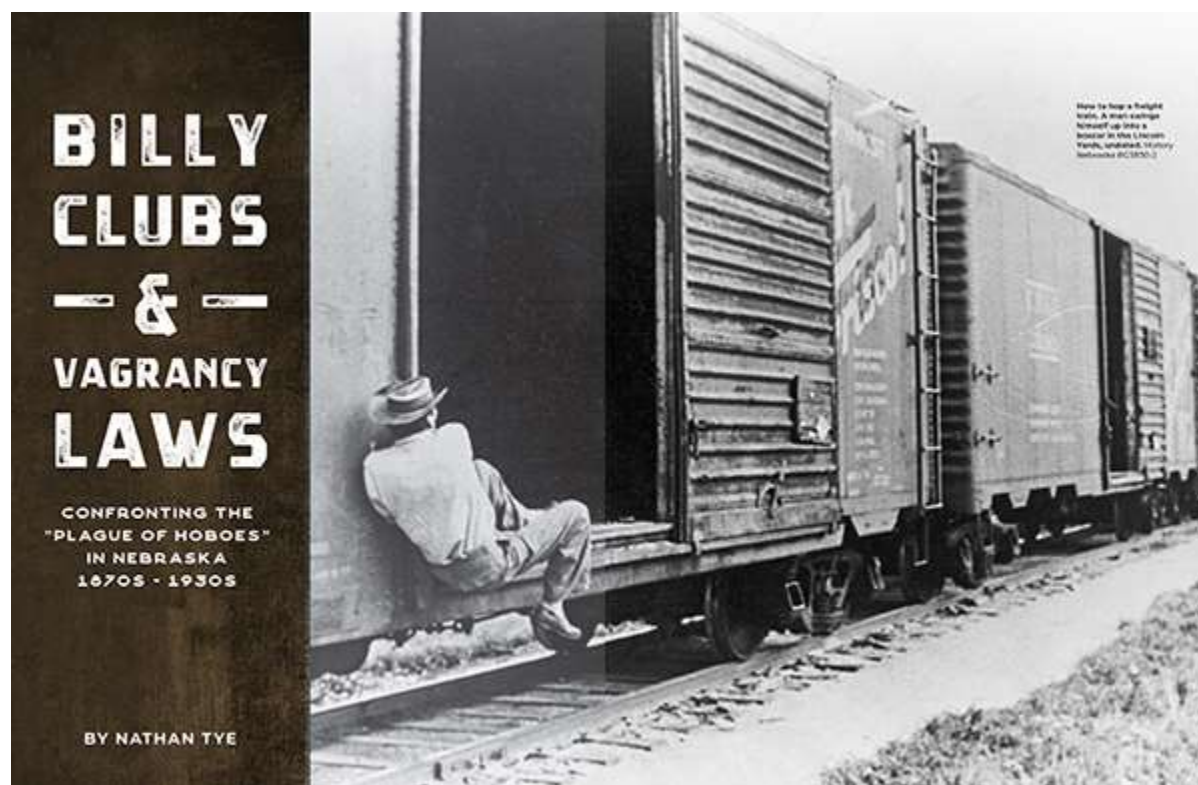
“It’s a kind of queer feeling to stand by the side of your grave—to know that part of you is standing above ground active and well, and the rest of you, your body, I mean, lies below, dead and buried,” MacDonald said. “But it was a good leg; it served me for many years, and I’m not going to forget it.”

Though the 1928 story is whimsical, the leg burial had a serious point behind it. The family was apparently celebrating the fact that they didn’t have to bury the rest of their husband and father. A week after the 1921 shootout, the *World-Herald* had run an editorial titled “The Police Problem,” in which it observed that “a policeman’s lot is not a happy one,” and that a patrolman “takes his life in hand to protect the community which pays him a very modest stipend to serve as the monitor of law and order.”

The rest of James McDonald joined his missing leg at Westlawn-Hillcrest Memorial Park after his death in 1932. The “Leg” headstone was replaced with a more conventional one with the inscription: “He fought a good fight.”

Billy clubs and vagrancy laws: hobos in Nebraska

January 3, 2019



What was it like to live as a hobo? And what did hobos experience in Nebraska? Consider this:

“Word came over the telegraph on June 2, 1904, that a group of hobos were bound for Kearney. Among them were burglars wanted in Grand Island. Kearney police officers positioned themselves on either side of the train, ready to arrest whomever disembarked. Five men hopped off, spotted the police, and scattered. An officer commandeered a bicycle and sped off after a fleeing hobo. A half-mile later he overtook the hobo, but he was not one of the burglars. Asked why he ran, the hobo said police along the Union Pacific line regularly beat anyone stealing rides and he assumed he was next. The officers let him go.”

So begins “Billy Clubs and Vagrancy Laws: Confronting the ‘Plague of Hoboes’ in Nebraska, 1870s-1930s,” in the Winter 2018 issue of *Nebraska History*.

The topic was a challenge for author Nathan Tye, a doctoral candidate at the Department of History at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. A hobo’s transient lifestyle didn’t produce a lot of written records. A research grant from the Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation helped Tye compile information scattered among multiple sources. (As shown by the quotation below, some men who rode the rails in their youth later wrote about their experiences, and a few former hobos became famous authors.)



Illustration: From Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, Feb. 2, 1878. "Tramps," later known as "hobos" were often portrayed negatively in the press. In reality, it was the hobos themselves who were often violently thrown from trains.

Top of page: Opening spread of Tye's article in Nebraska History. Undated photo shows a man swinging himself into a boxcar in the Lincoln Yards. History Nebraska RG3830-2

Though later romanticized, hobos were unwelcome wherever they went. Tye writes:

"The most feared perpetrators of anti-hobo violence were not government officials but—as the hobo disclosed to the Kearney police officers in the introduction—the brutal private police officers and detectives hired by railroads to patrol yards and trains. Known to hobos as "bulls," these men were the bane of hobos everywhere. They threw hobos from moving trains, shook them down for money, and regularly beat them within inches of their lives with billy clubs or brakemen's clubs. This abuse haunted former hobos for the remainder of their lives. [Jack London](#) admitted, "I'll never get over it. I can't help it. When a bull reaches, I run." In 1897, when a nineteen-year-old [Carl Sandburg](#) hopped out of a boxcar in McCook's yard he found "a one-eyed man in a plain clothes with a club and a star stood in my way." After the bull made it clear his type was not welcome, Sandburg climbed into his boxcar and went east. After a few days filling up on pilfered corn in a hobo jungle outside Aurora, he traveled to Nebraska City where he chopped lumber, picked apples, and slept in a jail cell."

Sandburg then headed for Omaha, where the Jobbers Canyon warehouse district was known as the "hobo capital" because of its reliance on transient labor.



Photo: "Flophouse on lower Douglas Street, Omaha, Nebraska." Photo by John Vachon, November 1938. Library of Congress

Farms also relied on transient workers, especially at harvest time. People didn't like having poor, transient men around—except when they needed cheap labor. Tye argues that “hobos contributed to the development of Nebraska’s agricultural, legal, and social landscapes” but that their “presence is obscured in a historical narrative valorizing sod-busting families and not the hired hands and harvesters who labored alongside them every season.”

* * *

History Nebraska [members](#) receive quarterly issues of *Nebraska History* as part of their membership. Single copies are available from the [Nebraska History Museum](#) for \$7 (plus sales tax for Nebraska residents and shipping for mail orders).



Our new trustees for 2019

January 2, 2019



Charles Schroeder of Eagle and David C. Levy of Omaha have joined our Board of Trustees for 2019. History Nebraska is an independent Nebraska state agency that is directly governed by a fifteen-member board of trustees. Members elect twelve; the governor appoints three.

Charles P. “Chuck” Schroeder is a native of southwestern Nebraska ranch country near Palisade. He was named founding executive director of the University of Nebraska Rural Futures Institute in December 2013, the position from which he retired on June 30, 2018. He is now fully engaged in Schroeder Fine Art, with gallery shows and exhibitions in more than a half dozen venues since inception in July 2017.

Prior to joining the RFI, Schroeder served as president and executive director of the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Schroeder has held other leadership positions in the public, private and non-profit sectors, including serving as founding CEO of the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association; executive vice president and director of development at the University of Nebraska Foundation; and director of the Nebraska Department of Agriculture.

Schroeder was also involved in founding three rural-focused nonprofit organizations: the Heartland Center for Leadership Development, the Rural Policy Research Institute, and Agriculture Future of America. He is also an accomplished portrait artist and horseman.

Schroeder was with the Schroeder Cattle Company for about 30 years, until its sale in 2004. He is a graduate of the University of Nebraska with a degree in Animal Science. Chuck and his wife, Kathi, have one daughter, Lindsay Hastings, who is a faculty member at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and are also proud grandparents of two wonderful granddaughters.

David Levy is an attorney with approximately 20 years of experience representing clients in zoning, land use, energy, environmental and general real estate matters. He is the Chair of Baird Holm Law Firm’s Real Estate, Energy, Environmental and Government Relations practice groups.

Levy is a registered lobbyist in the State of Nebraska. In 2011, he led a group that introduced and lobbied for a bill that would create a state historic tax credit in Nebraska. In 2014, this effort successfully concluded with the passage a 20 percent state tax credit for rehabilitation of historic buildings in Nebraska.

Levy has earned the American Institute of Certified Planners designation, the City Planning profession’s highest level of certification. Since 2011, Levy’s peers have selected him for inclusion in The Best Lawyers in America in the field of Land Use & Zoning Law. In 2015, the American College of Real Estate Lawyers elected him as Fellow.

Levy devotes substantial time to the community. He currently serves as a Commissioner of the Omaha Housing Authority and as a member of the Omaha by Design Board of Directors. Before

beginning his legal career, David worked for seven years as a City Planner for the City and County of San Francisco. He is a native of Lincoln, Nebraska.

Learn more about the History Nebraska Board of Trustees [here](#).
